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AUTHOR Faingold, Eduardo D.
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ABSTRACT

An exercise in the evaluation of errors in Spanish (second language) composition is reported. The exercise, based on J. M. Hendrickson's "discovery" approach to learning, concerned correction of three error types: lexicon; grammar; and spelling. Subjects were 13 native English-speaking university students in a Spanish language program. In the first draft of a film review, the teacher provided feedback on the presence and location of errors but did not provide correct forms; the students were then responsible for finding the source of error and correcting it. The teacher subsequently built a profile of linguistic errors made by individual students and by the majority of the class, which is presented and discussed here. The exercise has as its objectives to help students correct errors in future compositions and to support classroom discussion of errors. Contains seven references. (MSE)

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The Evaluation of Linguistic Errors in Spanish Composition

Eduardo D. Faingold
Dept. of Languages, The University of Tulsa

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1. Introduction

This paper presents a novel exercise for the evaluation of linguistic errors in Spanish composition. This exercise is based on Hendrickson's (1978, 1980) 'discovery' approach and allows students a greater responsibility for their own learning. The exercise concerns the correction of three types of errors: (a)lexicon, (b)grammar, and (c)orthography.

The exercise is based on the analysis of two drafts of a film review written at home by a class of thirteen Anglo students at The University of Tulsa; the latter participated in a larger project that studies the acquisition and learning of Spanish composition skills by forty-five Hispanics and Anglos at the University of Tulsa (TU) and the State University of New York at Stony Brook (SUNY) (Faingold 1995).

The teacher provided 'indirect corrections', i.e. feedback on the presence and location of errors, but did not provide the correct grammatical, lexical, and orthographic structure in the correction of the first draft; the students 'discovered' the source of errors and rewrote the composition. Subsequently, the teacher builds a profile of the linguistic errors made by individual students as well as the majority of the class. The purpose of this exercise is two-fold: First, it helps students to correct errors in future compositions and enhances awareness of student's errors; and second, it helps the teacher to discuss grammar in class, since it provides 'natural' examples of linguistic errors that Anglo students are likely to make in a Spanish composition class.

2. The TU and SUNY project of Spanish writing

Except Faingold's (1995) recent pre-programmatic paper, no studies are available

comparing the Spanish writing of Hispanics and Anglos at American universities. That studies of this kind are needed is obvious given the hot political debates over educational measures and teaching "standard Spanish" vs. stigmatized varieties of Spanish. The University of Tulsa/SUNY project documents the development of writing by Hispanic and Anglo undergraduates at the State University of New York at Stony Brook (SUNY) and the University of Tulsa (TU), and relies on a large number of subjects in a real classroom situation (Faingold 1995).

Data were collected from two drafts of weekly compositions written by 45 students (200, 300, and 1000 words). The compositions are divided into six carefully designed writing tasks: (i)summary, (ii)film and book review, (iii)business letter, (iv)description, (v)narrative, (vi)long essay. The composition tasks are in turn divided into two major groups: Those written in class under some degree of pressure--with less time, without grammars, dictionary of synonyms, of usage, of verbs, etc.--and those written at home. The evaluation method is unobstrusive and natural, since it is restricted to the student's ongoing work. The teacher provides 'indirect corrections', i.e. feedback on the presence and location of errors, but does not provide the correct morphological, lexical, or syntactic structure in the correction of the first draft (Hendrickson 1978, 1980). The teacher also provides detailed comments on content and organization. The student 'discovers' the source of errors and rewrites the composition. Thus, the findings stem from two ways in which the compositions are coded: An evaluation of the linguistic errors and a holistic composition profile. In the first procedure, information on error type is obtained (e.g. wrong choice of grammar,

vocabulary, orthography); and in the second, a holistic profile is created following Valdés et al's (1986) 'reader oriented' approach (e.g. content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics).

3. Results and discussion

This section discusses three types of errors in a film review written by thirteen Anglo students in a Spanish composition class at the University of Tulsa . The latter were drawn from a larger study of Spanish composition skills by Anglos and Hispanics at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and The University of Tulsa-- the TU/SUNY project of the acquisition and learning of Spanish writing. Errors are of three types: (i)lexicon (e.g. violation of selection restrictions, registers, interference, borrowing), (ii)grammar (e.g. agreement, prepositions, auxiliars *ser/estar*, omission of object and relative pronouns, prepositions, articles), and (iii)orthography (e.g. written stress, letters).

3.1. Lexicon

Table 1 shows errors of lexicon in film reviews written by Anglos in a Spanish composition class at The University of Tulsa.

insert Table 1

In Table 1, examples (1)*Scotland/England*, and (2)*Navy* are borrowings from English,

since the students use the English language name of the country or military service, rather than Spanish *Inglaterra, Escocia, Marina*. Similarly, examples (5)*juega* and (9)*preguntar* are errors of interference from English, since in Spanish 'play' can mean either *actuar* or *jugar*, and 'ask' can mean either *preguntar* or *pedir*. Examples (4)*erase* and (6)*Nomás* are errors of register, since in (4) the student uses a 'high-looking' register (rather than the formula employed in children's tales--*había una vez*...), while in (6) the student uses a Mexican colloquialism (rather than the standard word employed in Spanish writings--*inmediatamente*. Examples (7)*fusila* and (8)*hicieron* are a violation of the selection restrictions of Spanish, since *asesinos* and *película* cannot be the objects of *fusilar* and *hacer* respectively--except in 'marked' cases when, e.g., the former are in the military and the actors in the movie are also the producers or directors (see, e.g., Faingold 1995b, 1996, for discussion of markedness in linguistics). Similarly, in (3)*cuento* is another violation of the selection restrictions of Spanish, since the word used to designate the movie's 'story' (*cuento*) is *libreto* ('script').

3.2. Grammar

Table 2 shows errors of grammatical choice in film reviews written in Spanish by Anglos.

insert Table 2

In Table 2.1., examples (1) - (7) are all errors of agreement (masc./fem., sing./pl.).

In Table 2.2., examples (1) - (4), the students use the prepositions *a, por, para* ungrammatically, instead of the grammatical forms *en, con, a, del.*

In Table 2.3., the student uses the auxiliar *estar* instead of standard Spanish *ser*; the reason is, perhaps, interference from 'to be', which means both *ser* and *estar* in English.

Table 3 shows missing grammatical structures.

insert Table 3

In Table 3.1, the student's grammar lacks the indirect object pronoun *le.*

In Table 3.2., examples (1) - (2), the students lack the relative pronoun *que.*

In Table 3.3., examples (1) - (4), the students lack the prepositions *para, a, de.*

In Table 3.4., examples (1) - (2), the students lack the masc. sing. and fem. sing. articles *el, la.*

3.3. Orthography

Table 4 shows errors of orthography in film reviews written by Anglos in a Spanish composition class.

insert Table 4

In Table 4.1., examples (1) and (3), the students omit the standard written accent, while in (2) and (3) the students write accents where standard written Spanish has none. In Table 4.2., examples (1) - (3), the students write the letters *t, n, ñ*, instead of standard Spanish *c, ñ, n*; in examples (4) - (5) the students omit the letters *e, t*; and in (6) the student inserts the letter *i* where standard written Spanish has none.

4. Conclusion

In sum, Anglo learners of written Spanish all make linguistic errors, including lexical as well grammatical and orthographic errors. On the basis of the linguistic errors discussed in this paper, the teacher builds a profile of paradigmatic errors made by individual students as well as the majority of the class; the latter serves as a guide for the correction of errors that individual students or the majority of the class are likely to make in future compositions, as well as material for future discussion of grammatical issues in class.

5. References

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Table 1
Lexicon

(1) *Scotland* conquistó a *England* (Escocia)
(2) La *Navy* en la película (Marina)
(3) El *cuento* de la película (libreto)
(4) *Erase* una vez (había)
(5) Tom Cruise *juega* en la película (actúa)
(6) *Nomás* después de... (inmediatamente)
(7) Samuel Jackson *fusila* a los asesinos (mata)
(8) Los actores *hicieron* bien la película (actuaron)
(9) *preguntar* una cita (pedir)
(10) la película es *publicada* (vista)

Table 2
Grammatical Choice

2.1. Agreement
(1) *el* película histórico (la)
(2) *mucho* acción (mucha)
(3) un *autor* (autora)
(4) libros *magnífico* (magníficos)
(5) *la* tema (el)
(6) *los* mentes (las)
(7) efectos *especial* (especiales)

2.2. Prepositions
(1) golpe *a* la cabeza (en)
(2) quiere casarse *a* Bill (con)
(3) invitación *por* una cita (a)
(4) Tiene miedo *para* el vampiro (del)

2.3. Auxiliars ser/estar
está un admirador de Bill (es)

Table 3
Missing Grammatical Structure

3.1. Indirect object pronoun (me, te, le, se, etc.)
la princesa 0 dijo a él (le)

3.2. Relative pronoun
(1) la película 0 miré (que)
(2) esta película es para personas 0 les gustan ([a las] que)

3.3. Preposition
(1) 0 responder a esta pregunta, yo voy... (para)
(2) quiere matar 0 las personas (a)
(3) tiene miedo 0 preguntar (de)
(4) la vida 0 casado (de)

3.4. Article
(1) la cita es 0 punto culminante (el)
(2) aprender sobre 0 amor y 0 vida (el/la)

Table 4
Orthography

4.1. Stress
(1) *pelicula* (película)
(2) tráma (trama)
(3) actuarón (actuaron)
(4) *ficcion* (ficción)

4.2. Letter
(1) *investigatión* (investigación)
(2) *ano* (año)
(3) *esceña* (escena)
(4) *speciales* (especiales)
(5) *toruró* (torturó)
(6) *adimirable* (admirable)